

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently amended) A method Method for the prevention or retarding of staling during the baking process of bakery products which comprises the step of adding a sufficiently effective amount of at least one intermediate thermostable and/or thermostable serine protease in said bakery products.

2. (Currently amended) The method Method according to claim 1, ~~characterised in that wherein~~ the intermediate thermostable and/or thermostable serine protease has a temperature activity optimum higher than 60°C, ~~preferably higher than 70°C and more preferably higher than 75°C.~~

3. (Currently amended) The method Method according to the claim 1 ~~or 2, characterised in that wherein~~ the ratio between the protease activity at optimum temperature and the protease activity at 25°C is higher than 10, ~~preferably higher than 15.~~

4. (Currently amended) The method Method according to Claim 1 ~~any one of the preceding claims, characterised in that wherein~~ the intermediate thermostable and/or thermostable serine protease is obtained by extraction from naturally-occurring eukaryotic or prokaryotic organisms, by synthesis or by genetic engineering.

5. (Currently amended) The method Method according to Claim 1 ~~any one of the preceding claims, characterised in that wherein~~ the intermediate thermostable and/or thermostable serine protease is a neutral protease ~~or more preferably an alkaline protease.~~

6. (Currently amended) The method Method according to Claim 1 ~~any one of the preceding claims, characterised in that wherein~~ said protease is selected from the group consisting of aqualysin I, aqualysin II, thermitase and keratinase.

7. (Currently amended) The method Method according to Claim 1 ~~any one of the preceding claims, characterised in that wherein~~ the thermostable serine protease is a Taq protease isolated from *Thermus aquaticus* LMG 8924, a keratinase, isolated from *Bacillus licheniformis* LMG 7561 and/or a thermitase isolated from *Thermoactinomyces vulgaris*.

8. (Currently amended) The method Method according to Claim 1 ~~any one of the preceding claims, further comprising the step of adding another anti-staling additive selected from the group consisting of thermostable α -amylase, β -amylase, intermediate thermostable maltogenic amylase, lipase, glycosyltransferases, pullulanases and emulsifiers, preferably monoglycerides, diglycerides and/or stearyl lactylates.~~

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9. (Currently amended) The method ~~Method~~ according to Claim 1 ~~any one of the preceding claims, characterised in that~~ wherein the bakery product is selected from the group consisting of bread, soft rolls, bagels, donuts, Danish pastry, hamburger rolls, pizza, pita bread and cakes.

10. (Currently amended) An improver ~~Improver~~ for the prevention or retarding of staling during the baking process of bakery products, ~~characterised in that~~ wherein said improver it comprises at least one intermediate thermostable or thermostable serine protease.

11. (Currently amended) The improver ~~Improver~~ as in claim 10, ~~characterised in that~~ wherein the protease has a temperature activity optimum higher than 60°C, ~~preferably higher than 70°C and more preferably higher than 75°C.~~

12. (Currently amended) The improver ~~Improver~~ as in claim 10 ~~or 11~~, ~~characterised in that~~ wherein the ratio between the protease activity at optimum temperature and the protease activity at 25°C is higher than 10, ~~preferably higher than 15.~~

13. (Currently amended) The improver ~~Improver~~ as in ~~any of the claims~~ Claim 10 to 12, ~~characterised in that~~ wherein said protease is obtained by extraction from naturally occurring eukaryotic or prokaryotic organisms, by synthesis or by genetic engineering

14. (Currently amended) The improver ~~Improver~~ as in ~~any of the claims~~ Claim 10 to 13, ~~characterised in that~~ wherein said protease is a Taq protease, a keratinase and/or a thermitase.

15. (Currently amended) The improver ~~Improver~~ as in ~~any of the claims~~ Claim 10 to 14, ~~characterised in that~~ wherein said protease is selected from the group consisting of aqualysin I, aqualysin II, keratinase and thermitase.

16. (Currently amended) The improver ~~Improver~~ according to ~~any of the claims~~ Claim 10 to 15, ~~characterised in that~~ wherein the thermostable serine protease is a Taq protease isolated from *Thermus aquaticus* LMG 8924, a keratinase isolated from *Bacillus licheniformis* LMG 7561 and/or a thermitase isolated from *Thermoactinomyces vulgaris*.

17. (Currently amended) The improver ~~Improver~~ as in ~~any of the claims~~ Claim 10 to 16, ~~characterised in that it further comprises~~ comprising another anti-staling additive selected from the group consisting of thermostable α -amylase, β -amylase, intermediate thermostable maltogenic amylase, lipase, glycosyltransferases, pullulanases and emulsifiers, ~~preferably monoglycerides, diglycerides and/or stearyl lactylates.~~

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18. **(Currently amended)** The improver ~~Improver~~ as in ~~any of the claims~~ Claim 10 to 17, characterised in that wherein said improver is a bread improver.

19. **(Canceled)**

20. **(Canceled)**

21. **(Canceled)**

22. **(Canceled)**

23. **(New)** The method of Claim 2, wherein the intermediate thermostable and/or thermostable serine protease has a temperature activity optimum higher than 70°C.

24. **(New)** The method of Claim 2, wherein the intermediate thermostable and/or thermostable serine protease has a temperature activity optimum higher than 75°C.

25. **(New)** The method of Claim 3, wherein the ratio between the protease activity at optimum temperature and the protease activity at 25°C is higher than 15.

26. **(New)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the intermediate thermostable and/or thermostable serine protease is an alkaline protease.

27. **(New)** The method of Claim 8, wherein said emulsifiers are selected from the group consisting of monoglycerides, diglycerides and stearylactylates.

28. **(New)** The improver of Claim 11, wherein said protease has a temperature activity optimum higher than 70°C.

29. **(New)** The improver of Claim 11, wherein said protease has a temperature activity optimum higher than 75°C.

30. **(New)** The improver of Claim 12, wherein the ratio between the protease activity at optimum temperature and the protease activity at 25°C is higher than 15.

31. **(New)** The improver of Claim 17, wherein said emulsifiers are selected from the group consisting of monoglycerides, diglycerides and stearylactylates.